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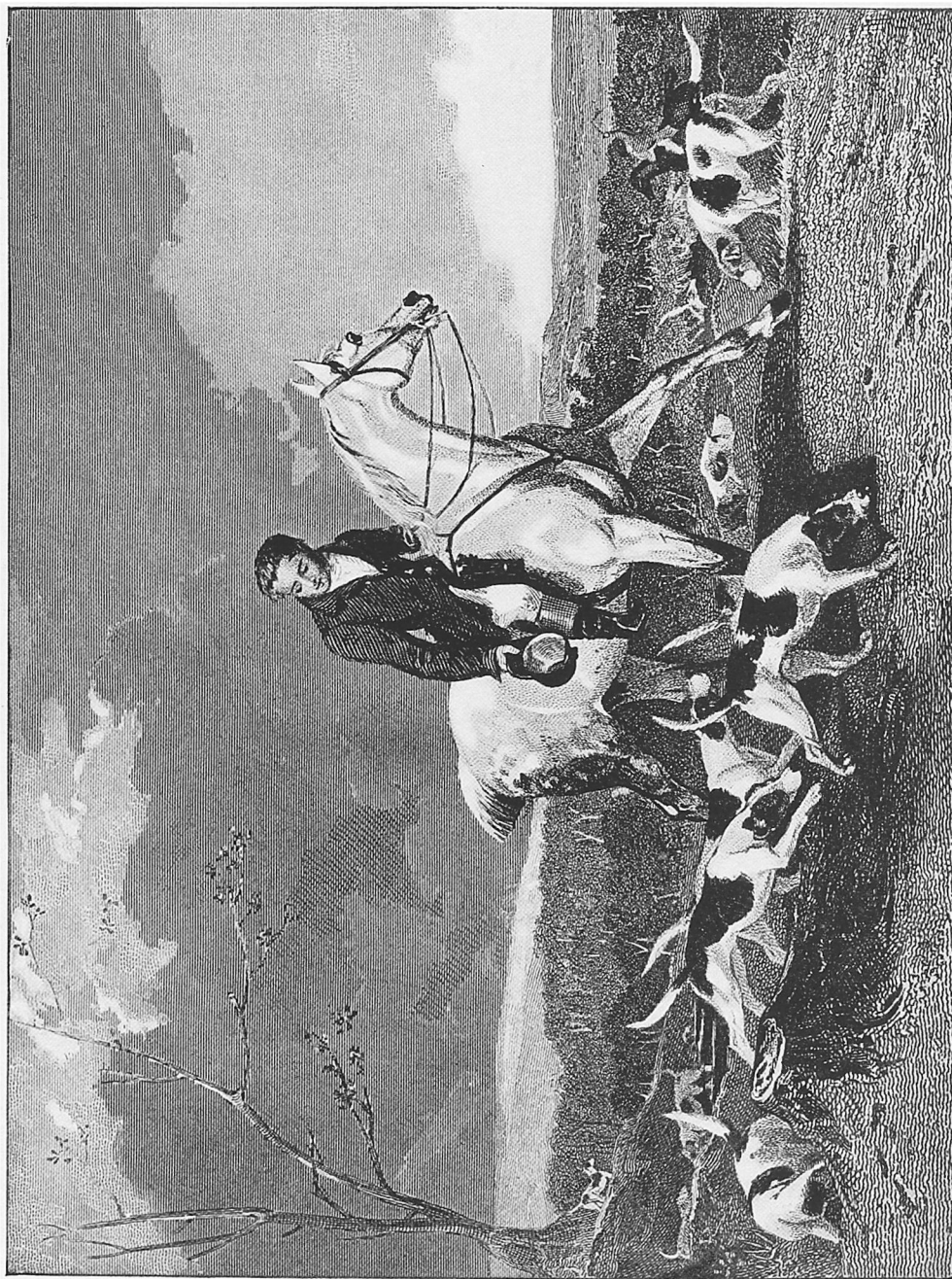
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The Check

AN EARLY XIX CENTURY FOX-HUNT IN ENGLAND

“THE hour most favourable to the diversion,” says Beckford, “is certainly an early one; nor do I think I can fix it better than to say, the hounds should be at the cover-side at sun-rising.”

“Nimrod,” on the other hand says: “Let us indulge ourselves with a fine morning in the first week of February, and at least two hundred well mounted men by the cover-side. Time being called, say a quarter past eleven, nearly our great grandfathers’ dinner hour, the hounds approach the furze brake, or, gorse, as it is called in that region.”

The style of cover may have been as different as the hour. Dorsetshire, presented immense tracts of ungovernable woodlands, consequently artificial covers were, or at least should have been, unknown. But the bullock fattening soil of Leicestershire, did not admit of such unthrifty produce as wood, at least not in her best fox-hunting preserves, consequently artificial covers supplied the place of woods. “Far be it from us, however, to say that they are either sightly or desirable objects,” writes a sporting authority of the day. “To say nothing of the useless profusion with which they are scattered over Leicestershire, producing short running foxes, there is too much of the hare and the turnip field air about them to excite those wild feelings of the chase, produced by the dash into an echoing wood of steady growth, when each hound is seen, nose

to ground, drawing steadily on his line.”

But let us suppose ourselves at a meet with Beckford. Our friends with the hounds are now in the background and two Squires are seen talking parish business perhaps, while a gartered groom holds the stirrup for a third. The country fox-hunter talks of turnips, the London one of Tamburini. Now, let our huntsman throw in his hounds as quietly as he can, and let two whippers-in keep watch of him on either side, so that a single hound may not escape them. Let them be attentive to his holloa, and be ready to encourage, or rate, as that directs. He will, of course, draw up the wind. Now, if you can keep your brother sportsmen in order, and put any discretion into them, you are in luck; for more frequently it helps them go. But if it is possible, persuade those who wish to holloa the foxes off to stand quiet under the cover-side, and on no account to holloa him too soon. If they do, he most certainly will turn back again. Could you induce them to enter the cover, your sport, in all probability, would not be the worse for it.

How well the hounds spread to cover and the huntsman, you see, is quite deserted, and his horse, which so lately had a crowd at his heels, has not now one attendant left. How steadily they draw! You hear not a single hound, yet none are idle. Is not this better



The Brook

than to be subjected to continual disappointment, from the eternal babbling of unsteady hounds?

In a very short time the gorse appears shaken in various parts of the cover, apparently from an unknown cause, not a single hound being for some minutes visible. Presently one or two appear leaping over some old furze, which they cannot push through, and exhibit to the field their glossy skins and spotted sides.

How musical their tongues! As they get nearer to him, how the chorus fills! He is found! Now where are all your sorrows and your cares, ye gloomy souls! Where your pains and aches ye complaining ones! One "holloa" has dispelled them all.

What a crash they make! Echo takes pleasure to repeat the sound. The piscator forsakes his rod, lured by its melody; the listening plowman now stops his plow, and every distant shepherd neglects his flock, and runs to see him break. What joy! What eagerness in every face!

Now huntsman, get on with your head hounds. The whipper-in will string on the others after you. Keep an attentive eye on the leading hounds, that, should the scent fall off, you may know at least how far they brought it.

Mark Galloper, how he leads them! It is difficult to discover which is first, they run in such style; yet he is the foremost hound. The goodness of his nose is not less excellent than his speed. How he carries the scent! And when he loses it, see how eagerly he plans to recover it again! There, now he's at head again! See how they top the hedge! Now, how they mount the hill! Observe what a head they carry,

and show me, if thou canst, one shuffler or skirter amongst them! Are they not like a parcel of brave fellows, who, when they engage in an undertaking, determine to share its fatigue and its dangers equally among them?

It was then the fox was seen, as the field came down the hill. Those crows directed them which way to look, and the sheep ran from him as he passed along. Now see with what eagerness the hounds cross the plain! Galloper no longer keeps his place, Brusher takes it. See how he plans for the scent, and how impetuously he runs! How eagerly he takes the lead, and how he strives to keep it! Yet Victor comes up apace. He reaches him! See what an excellent race it is between them! It is uncertain which will reach the cover first. How eagerly they run! They strain! Now Victor, Victor, Victor! Ah! Brusher you are beaten; Victor first tops the hedge! See there! See how they all take it in their strokes! The hedge creaks with their weight, so many jump at once!

Huntsman! At fault at last? How far did you bring the scent? If the hounds made their own cast, now make yours. You see that sheep-dog has coursed the fox. Get forward with your hounds, and make a wide cast.

Hark! That holloa is indeed a lucky one. If we can hold him on, we may yet recover him. For a fox so much distressed must stop at last. We will now see if they will hunt as well as run; for there is but little scent, and the impending cloud makes that little less. How they enjoy the scent! See how busy they all are, and how each in his turn prevails.

Huntsman! Be quiet! Whilst the



The Death

scent was good, you pressed on your hounds. It was well done. When they came too thick, you stood still and interrupted them not. They were afterwards at fault; you made your cast with judgment, and lost no time. Now you must let them hunt. With such a cold scent as this you can do no good. They must do it all themselves. Lift them now, and not a hound will stoop again. Ha! a highroad at such a time as this, when the tenderest-nosed hound can hardly own the scent! Another fault! That man at work, then, has headed back the fox. Huntsman! Cast in your hounds now. You see they have over-run the scent. Have a little patience, and let them, for once, try back.

We must now give time. See where they bend towards yonder furze brake! I wish he may have stopped there! Mind that old hound, how he dashes o'er the furze. I think he winds him! Now for a fresh entapis! Hark! they holloa! Aye, there he goes!

It is nearly over with him. Had the hounds got view, he must have died. He will hardly reach the cover. See how they gain upon him at every

stroke! It is an admirable race, yet the cover saves him.

Now be quiet, and he cannot escape us. We have the wind of the hounds, and cannot be better placed. How short he runs! He is in the very strongest part of the cover. What a crash! Every hound is good, and every hound is running for him. That was a quick turn! Again another! He's put to his last shifts.

Mischief is at his heels, and death is not far off. Ha! they all stop at once, all silent. Listen! They are at him again! Did you hear that hound catch view?

They overran the scent, and the fox had laid down behind them. Now, Reynard, look to yourself! How quick they all give their tones! Little Dreadnought, how he tracked him! the terriers, too, they now are squeaking at him. How close Vengeance pursues! How terribly she presses! It is just up with him! Gods! What a crash they make! the whole wood resounds! that turn was very short!

Now, aye, now they have him!
"Who-hoop!"